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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of cooperative and negative behavior in a setting in which children of varied ages had regular opportunities for social encounters. Subjects were 16 children, half 16-19 months, half 28-32 months. Each child was observed 30 minutes per day for five days. Behaviors were recorded continuously. A narrative written record was made distinguising child and adult interchanges and specifying who initiated the interchanges. Results centered around the following questions: (1) How do children in the middle of their second and third years differ in their social initiations to peers and adults? (2) How does the age of the peer in the dyad affect these developmental findings? (3) How does the course or dynamics of the interchange relate to the age of the child? Behaviors were organized into two broad categories: prosocial and negative. More prosocial than negative social initiations were observed. More negative behaviors were observed toward peers than adults. Older children showed more prosocial than negative behavior to other 2 1/2 year-old peers. Younger children showed no reliable difference in type of behavior initiated to other 1 1/2 year-old peers. In summary, a basic finding was that the other person in the dyad was a critical component in the social system. (MS)

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Social Interchanges in the 2nd and 3rd Years

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Social Interchanges in the 2nd and 3rd Years

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The work I shall discuss is logically linked to that just reported by Gustafson in that our focus was also on how the different age of the social partner affected social behavior. However, our target subjects were different aged peers as well as peer and adults. Our research was concerned with how cooperative and negative behavior develops in a setting where children of varied ages had regular opportunities for social encounters. In particular, we focused on how feedback from others served to support and maintain specific prosocial and negative or potentially negative acts. In contrast with prior laboratory studies but very similar to the study just reported, the present observations were made in the setting in which children were familiar with others and presumably tapped the dynamics of the several kinds of relationships formed at these early ages.

The results of our observations were centered around the following questions:

1. How do children in the middle of their 2nd and 3rd years differ in their social initiations to peers and to adults.

2. How does the age of the peer in the dyad affect these developmental findings?

3. and most importantly concerning the dyadic features of the encounter--How does the course or dynamics of the interchange relate to the age of the child?

We observed four boys and four girls 16-19 months old (the 1 1/2 year olds) and four boys and four girls 28-32 months old (the 2 1/2 year olds). These 16 children were among the 34 who attended the Frank Porter Graham Child

Development Center and had been enrolled in the Center since they were 4 weeks old. All children were Black and were from low income families.

We observed each child 30 minutes per day for five consecutive days. Thus for each child we collected 2.5 hours of observations. The children were observed each morning between 9:30 and 11:30. Their activities during this time included child directed play, teacher directed curriculum activities, outdoor play, diaper changing, and lunch.

All behaviors of the children were recorded continuously by 10 second intervals. A narrative written record was made distinguishing child and adult interchanges and specifying who initiated or started the interchanges. For observer agreement a second observer recorded data with the main observer for 25 of the 80 observation periods. Average percent agreement on peer interchanges was 83 percent and on adult interchanges was 80 percent.

To begin our analyses, we organized behaviors into two broad categories: prosocial and negative behavior. Briefly, prosocial included behaviors of positive physical contact such as holding hands, offers of objects, gestures such as waving, verbal questions, request, and commands, matching behaviors such as simultaneous banging of spoons on the table, complementary acts such as stacking rings on a peg alternately teaching or assisting such as giving instructions about how to work a puzzle, and caretaking such as blowing noses or putting on sweaters. Negative behavior included taking objects from others, striking (i.e., pushing, kicking, pinching...) others, crying and fussing, and negative commands.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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Three points can be made from Figure 1 showing initiations to same aged peers and to adults by the two age groups: 1) More prosocial than negative

social initiations were observed (a surprising result for some of our teachers), 2) More negative behaviors were observed toward peers than to adults. These two general results corroborate the findings of Gustafson, indicating that this specific population exhibited behaviors similar to those of a more diverse sample. The third point concerns the developmental shift in the relative amounts of prosocial and negative behavior to same aged peers: the older children showed more prosocial than negative behavior to other 2 1/2 year olds. The younger showed no reliable difference in the type of behavior they initiated to other 1 1/2 year olds peers. They were as likely to give or request something from a peer as they were to reach out and grab it. These differences were statistically reliable as tested by a multivariate analysis of variance technique.

To further demonstrate the discriminating capabilities and limitations of these two age groups and to move closer to the dynamics of the interchange, we looked at the types of initiations made to other aged peers. Figure 2 shows

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Insert Figure 2 About Here

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that the older children exhibited different initiation patterns toward peers depending on the age of the peer i.e., there was more prosocial than negative behavior with same age peers but an equal amount of both behaviors with younger peers. The younger children were equally positive and negative both with their same age mates and with their older peers.

We then asked what phenomena might be associated with these developmental differences. We originally intended to focus only on the development of cooperative or helpful acts at this early age. However, we were struck by the frequency of a very salient act--that of taking or attempting to take toys from other children, a behavior frequently noted in the literature but

infrequently analyzed for its dynamic properties. Thus we made a detailed analyses of the interchanges of both age groups for three modes of initiations: take toy, strike and offer.

We were surprised to find that for both ages when an "anti-social" and "disruptive" act by our adult standards occurred, the reaction 1/3 of the time by the peer was to pay no attention--they either ignored the physical overture or relinguished the toy uncontested--hardly a disruptive consequence from the child's perspective. This finding is in accordance with that just reported by Gustafson for her sample. We also found that a rather high proportion (1/2) of offers were ignored by both age groups. Thus our older children were not recognizing all opportunities for social contacts even though they were able to discriminate which peers were more viable for which kinds of behaviors.

Two important differences were noted for the 2 ages, however, in the patterns of interchange which followed when responses were made--i.e., when the takes or strikes were contested and the offers were accepted. Figure 3

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Insert Figure 3 About Here

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shows those differences for patterns which began with a take/strike and were characterized as elaboration and escalation. Elaboration refers to interchanged in which the response mode of each dyad member changes in positive or nondisruptive ways as the interaction continued. Escalations were interchanges which not only involved changing response modes but which also increase in intensity and involved hurtful responses.

Specifically Figure 3 shows that given a strike or take toy initiation, the probability that the interchange would be elaborated was higher for older

children than for the younger children. Exactly the reverse was true for escalation, that is, the probability that expanded interchanges would take a more disruptive course was higher for younger than for older children.

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Insert Figure 4 About Here

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The same finding held for the offer initiations: older children were able to elaborate these initiations--the younger did not. I should note, however, that the frequency of expanded interchanges for the younger children was very low. What is important is that the older children did not allow these interchanges to get out of control.

Additional evidence for differential control capabilities by these two age groups came from looking at complementary interchanges, those with only 2 moves of different response modes, one by each peer. For example, take--"no"; hit--cry; take--pull away. Although the proportion of contested takes or protested strikes which were of a short duration (merely complementary acts) was similar for both age groups (45 and 51 percent) the nature of the second move differed. As Figure 5 shows, the younger children responded most often by crying to both takes and strikes. The older children cried less often and either emitted a physical response in return (i.e., they hit, pushed, held on, or moved) or they verbalized (said no, stop, mine).

In summary, a basic finding was that the <u>other person</u> in the dyad was a critical component in the social system--children was young as 1 1/2 years old did not have similarly toward will persons. As we saw, all children directed negative behavior to peers rather than to adults. The impact of the "other" person became greater as the children matured as reflected by <u>only</u> the <u>older</u> children directing relatively fewer negative than prosocial behaviors to

other same aged peers. In addition their fewer negative than prosocial initiations were restricted to their age mate.

Having noted this developing ability to discriminate among social partners we must now raise the question of how the other person influenced the interaction? One proposal is that the actions and counter actions of the other are effective controlling factors. As Gustafson reported, adults quickly and effectively terminated negative behavior either with a physical restraint or verbal command. Our findings were that older children used verbal commands to counter act or inhibit specific negative acts whereas younger children primarily cried.

However, a second proposal must be offered since an absolute decrease in the number of total negative acts was not observed across the age span. We suggest that the increase of prosocial acts was associated with an increased capability to employ more sophisiticated means of interacting. Our findings that older children controlled the course of expanded interchanges to permit elaboration and to prevent escalation support this proposal.

In conclusion our data caution against expecting or assigning behavioral trait labels to particular groups of children and assuming that with time children will outgrow the label. Although we were impressed with the frequent physical and potentially negative acts from these yonng children a closer and more fine grained analyses showed their presence or absence in the interchange to be greatly dependent on the response capabilities of the children in the dyad and the abilities to discriminate reciprocal acts of each other.

Finally, it is unlikely that the essential controlling factors in the interchange will be isolated by exclusive reliance on observation analyses alone. Rather what is needed are naturalistic observations to suggest the variables which can then be manipulated as experimental treatments.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

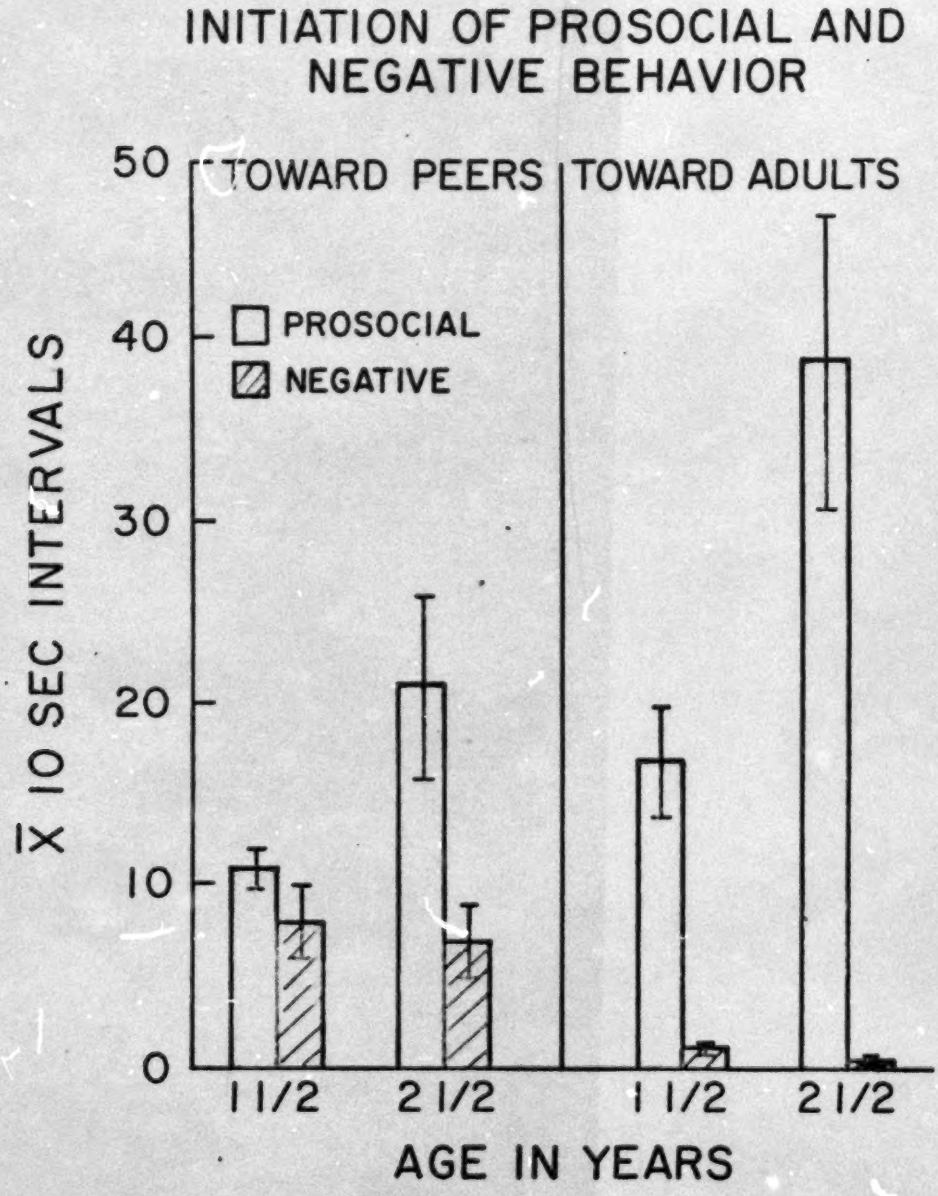
1. The mean number of 10 sec intervals of prosocial and assertive behavior initiated to same aged peers and to adults by 1 1/2 year old and 2 1/2 year old children. The overall MANOVA indicates a main effect of behavior type (i.e., more prosocial than assertive initiations, $F(1,14) = 53.4$, $p < .001$) and an interaction between target maturity and behavior type (i.e., virtually no assertive acts toward adults, $F(2,13) = 60.09$, $p < .001$). Finally, the three-way interaction between age of subject, behavior type, and age of target, was reliable, $F(2,13) = 14.01$, $p < .001$. The youngest children (1 1/2 years old) did not differ in assertive-prosocial acts directed toward peers, but the older children (2 1/2 years old) showed significantly more prosocial behavior in their peer relationships.

2. The mean number of 10 sec intervals of prosocial and negative initiations to same aged peers and to younger peers by the 2 1/2 year olds. The older children initiated more prosocial behavior to same aged peers than to younger peers while their negative initiations to the two ages of peers were undifferentiated. The 1 1/2 year olds initiated similar frequencies of prosocial and negative behaviors to both peer groups.

3. The probability of an interchange characterized as elaboration (+) or escalation (-) following a take or strike initiation is shown for 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 year olds. The older children were more likely to direct the interchange in a positive course than younger children and less likely to permit the interchange to escalate.

4. The probability of an interchange characterized as elaboration (+) or escalation (-) following an offer initiation is shown for 1/1/2 and 2 1/2 year olds. The older children were more likely to elaborate the interchange in a positive direction and less likely to escalate it in a negative direction than the younger children.

5. The termination more (final or second response) in a take or strike initiated interchange is shown for 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 year olds. The younger children were more likely to cry than older children. The older children were more likely to make a physical response or a verbal command than younger children.


INITIATION OF PROSOCIAL AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR
TOWARD PEERS
TOWARD ADULTS
PROSOCIAL
NEGATIVE
X̄ 10 SEC INTERVALS
50
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20
10
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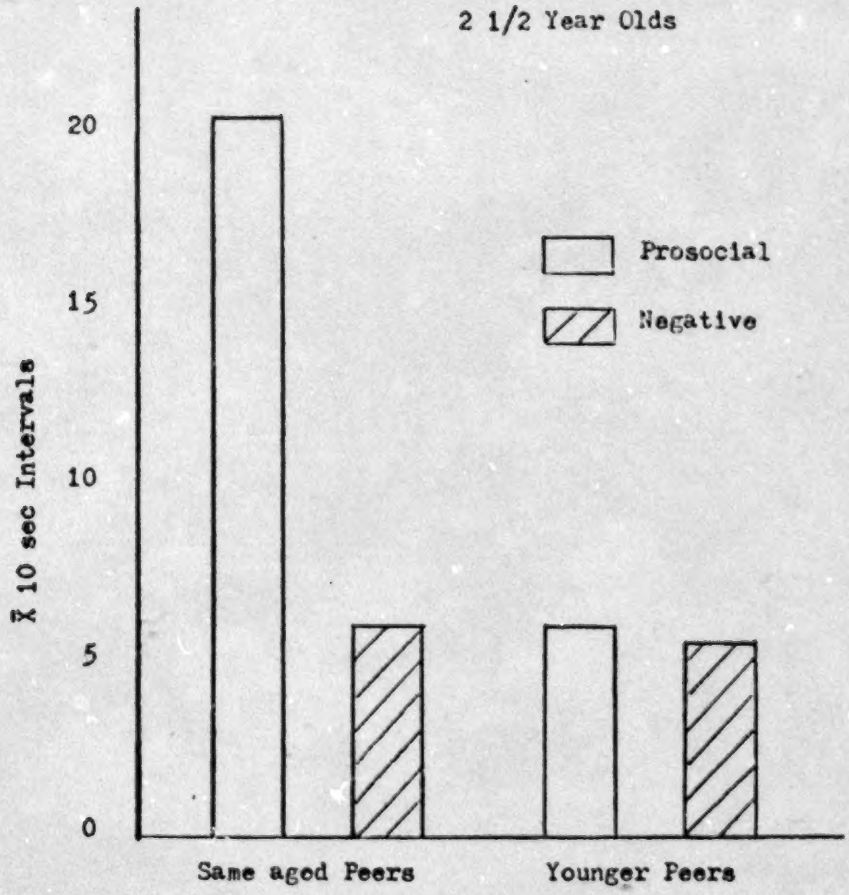
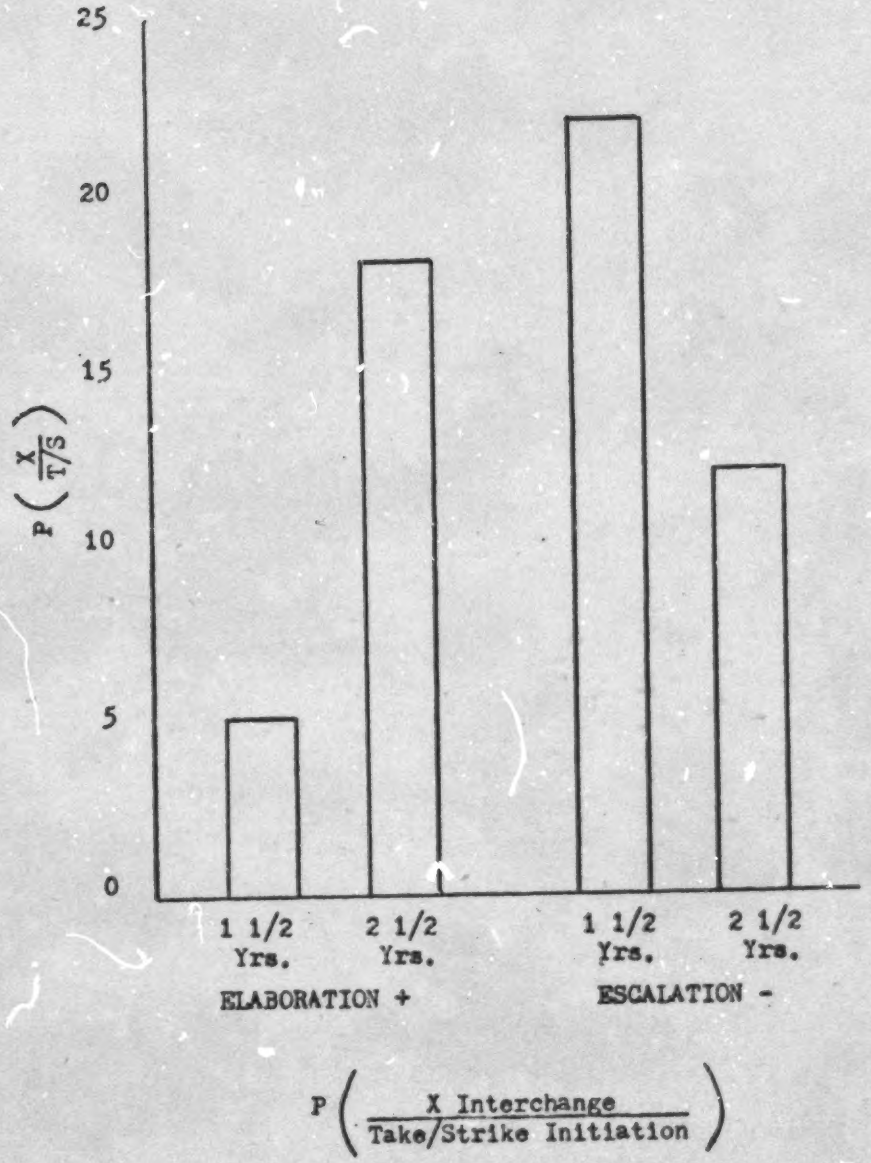
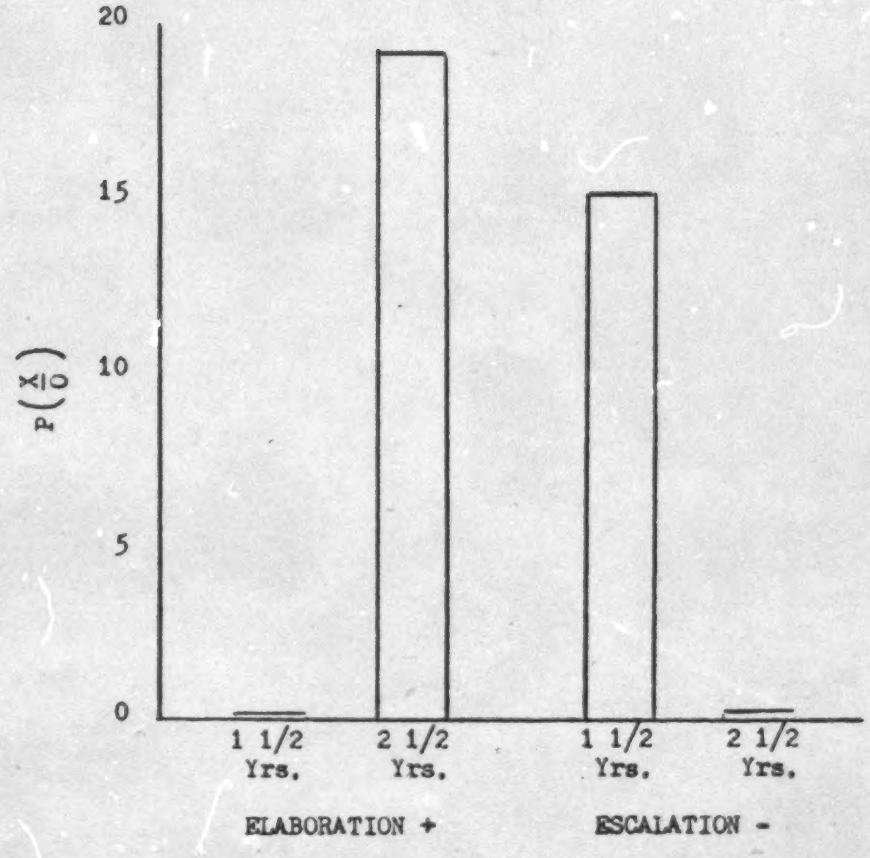
1 1/2
2 1/2
1 1/2
2 1/2
AGE IN YEARS



Mean Frequency of Prosocial and Negative Initiations



$$P\left(\frac{\text{X Interchange}}{\text{Take/Strike Initiation}}\right)$$



$$P\left(\frac{X \text{ Interchange}}{\text{Offer Initiation}}\right)$$

$$p\left\langle \frac{\text{Termination Move}}{\text{Take/Strike Complementary Interchange}} \right\rangle$$

AGE	CRY	PHYSICAL	VERBAL
1 1/2 Years	.59	.27	.15
2 1/2 Years	.13	.50	.38